

The prologe of the frankeleyns tale.

THIS olde gentil Briton in hir dayes Of diverse adventures maden layes, Rymeyd in hir firste Briton tonge; Whiche layes with hir instruments they songe, Or elles redde hem for hir plesauce; And oon of hem have I in remembrance, Which I shal seyn with good wyl as I kan.

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE FRANKLEYNs TALE.

ARMORIK, that called is Britayne, Ther was a knyght that loved and dide his payne To serve a lady in his beste wise; And many a labour, many a greet emprise He for his lady wroughte, er she were womne; For she was oon, the faireste under sonne, And eek therto come of so heigh kynrede, That wel unnethes dorste this knyght, for drede, Telle hire his wo, his payne, & his distresse. But atte laste, she, for his worthynesse, And namely for his meke obeysaunce, Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce, That pryvely she fil of his accord, To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord, Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves; And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves, Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght, That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght, Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie Agayn hir wyl, ne hithe hire jalousie; But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al, As any love to his lady shal; Save that the name of soveraynetee, That wolde he have, for shame of his degree.

But, sires, bycause I am a burel man, At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche, Have me excused of my rude speche. I lerned nevere rethorik certeyn; Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyne. I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso, Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Cithero, Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede, But swiche colours as grown in the mede, Or elles swiche as men dye or peynte, Colours of rethorik been me to queynte; My spirit feeleth noght of swich matere, But if yow list, my tale shul ye heere.

He thanked hym, and with ful greet humblesse, Sheseyde, Sire, sith of youre gentillesse Ye profre me to have so large a reyne, Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne, As in my gilt, were outhere werre or stryf, Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf; Have heer my trouthe, til that myn herte breste.

Thus been they bothe in quite & in reste, For o thyng, sires, sauflly dar I seye, That freendes everych oother moot obeye,

If they wol longe holden compaignye. Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrie; Whan maistrie comth, the god of love anon Beteth his wynges, and farewell! he is gon! Love is a thyng as any spirit free; Whommen of kynde desiren libertee, And nat to been constreyned as a thral; And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal. Looke, who that is moost pacient in love, He is at his advantage al above. Pacience is an heigh vertu certeyn; For it venquysseth, as this clerkes seyn, Thynges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne. For every word men may nat chide or pleyne, Lerneth to suffre, or elles so moot I goon, Ye shul it lerne, wherso ye wole or noon; For in this world, certein, ther no wight is That he ne dooth or seith somtyme amys, Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun, Wyn, wo, or chaungynge of complexioun, Causeth ful ofte to doon amys or speken. On every wrong a man may nat be wreken; After the tyme moste be temperaunce To every wight that kan on governaunce. And therfore hath this wise worthy knyght, To lyve in ese, suffraunce hire bihight, And she to hym ful wisly gan to swere That nevere sholde ther be defeaute in here.

REERE may men seen an humble wys accord; Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord, Servant in love, and lord in mariage,



Thanne was he bothe in lordship and servage; Servage? nay, but in lordshipe above, Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love; His lady, certes, and his wyf also, The which that lawe of love acordeth to. And whan he was in this prosperitee, Hoom with his wyf he gooth to his contree, Nat fer fro Denmark, ther his dwelling was, Wheras he lyveth in blisse and in solas.

Whokoude telle, but he hadde wedded be, The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee That is bitwixe an housbonde & his wyf? YEER & moore lasted this blisful lyf, Til that the knyght of which I speke of this,

That of Kayrrod was cleped Arveragus, Shoop hym to goon & dwelle a yeer or tweyne In Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne, To seke in armes worship and honour, For al his lust he sette in swich labour; And dwelled there two yeer, the book seith thus.

Now wol I stynte of this Arveragus, And speken I wole of Dorigene his wyf, That loveth hire housbonde as hire hertes lyf.

for his absence wepeth she and siketh, As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh. She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyne; Desir of his presence hire so distreyneth, That al this wyde world she sette at noght. Hire freendes, whiche that knewe hir hevvy thought, Conforten hire in al that ever they may; They prechen hire, they telle hire nyght and day, That causeles she sleeth hirself, alas! And every confort possible in this cas They doon to hire with al hire bisynesse, Al for to make hire leve hire hevynesse.

By proces, as ye knowen everichoon, Men may so longe graven in a stoon Til som figure therinne emprented be. So longe han they confortd hire, til she Receyved hath, by hope and by resoun, The emprenting of hire consolacioun, Thurgh which hir grete sorwe gan aswage; She may nat alwey duren in swich rage.

And eek Arveragus, in al this care, Hath sent hire lettres boon of his welfare, And that he wol come hastily agayn;